Boundary and Longing: Narrative Modes in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*

by

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# Table of Contents

Abstract  

Introduction  

Chapter One: Walton and Frankenstein: Pushing Through Boundaries and Separation  

Chapter Two: Lionel and Lord Raymond: Boundaries of Inner and Outer Selves  

Chapter Three: Feminism and Boundary in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*  

Conclusion  

Works Cited
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**ABSTRACT**

Boundary and desire surround the relationships in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*. The narrative modes of Captain Robert Walton relate his separation to the rest of the world and his need for companionship. Yet, not any companionship will satisfy his longing for connection with a human being; his search revolves around the need of common understanding. This further separates the character of Lionel in *The Last Man* from humanity in that he is unable to find anyone left on earth after a series of plague, war, and atmospheric anomalies apparently wipe out the human race. His survival hinges on the desire to find someone, anyone, in which to share any mode of common experience. His struggles with loneliness finally culminate in his autobiography.

Both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* deal with the issue of narrative and the bounds of human necessity for acceptance and companionship. Though both tales are from a male perspective, the gendered aspects of the stories further separate the characters in each novel. How each character is estranged by forces outside their control, and how they express this relationship between their internal selves and their outer selves, are at the core of each text. Through these ideas of boundary and belonging, this thesis will explore the relationships in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*. 
Introduction

In *Frankenstein*, the reader follows two characters, Walton and Frankenstein, who hope to push past normal accepted modes of knowledge and creation for altruistic aspirations. Yet, through the character of Captain Walton this need for thrusting through boundaries helps to heighten his own personal loneliness, creating a separation from a “common understanding” in companionship. This similar loneliness drives Lionel Verney’s character in *The Last Man* to reflect on the end of humanity.

Walton, for example, desires to push through societal boundaries in his crusade for a northwest passage. In contrast, Frankenstein laments his previous desires to push through boundaries of science and knowledge. Similarly, in *The Last Man*, Lionel witnesses the end of humanity through a combination of destroying borders using Raymond’s character, and outside forces. This creates a boundary between Lionel and the natural world, for his loneliness separates him from happiness and the fulfillment he once enjoyed. This study will explore the interplay of boundaries in these works.

These aforementioned characters witness the physical, societal, and mental crossing of boundaries in the text. Yet, the boundaries that are not crossed, but rather restrict and confine the characters, such as the desire for companionship, are also paramount in discussing the ultimate longings of these characters. It is important to examine and analyze these boundaries for each character, how they accept and desire the confines of certain societal boundaries, portrayed in the longing for companionship in
both Walton and Lionel, and how they break through these boundaries, as Walton pushes for discovery, and Lionel transverses the unknown by following Raymond.

By utilizing Julia Kristeva’s view of “borderline,” as it relates to marginal identities, the idea of positioning and boundary is paramount in the discussion of boundary as it relates to each of the characters. Toril Moi points out the connection of Kristeva’s work to borderline identities when she states that “[w]hat is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies,” offering this scenario: “if patriarchy sees women as occupying a marginal position within the symbolic order, then it can construe them as the limit or the borderline of that order” (248). As Moi points out, Kristeva’s discussion of the concept of marginal identity, that places people into the periphery of normally accepted modes of identity, is in constant relation to the position of the characters. This marginal identity, or “placement,” shows how each character situates identity in the text. Walton, Frankenstein, and his monster are all physically and metaphysically divorced from society, thus placing them in the margins. Lionel finds himself separated from society by the end of civilization, and by his survival of the plague. Kristeva’s views of “borderline” identities become a driving force for these characters by existing outside societal and mental boundaries, by choice or by force. This positioning helps to illuminate their desires, their ideas of “boundary,” and how they try to cross these lines of boundary and identity.

With the idea of boundary as a destructive, and at times a self-destructive force, this study will look at boundary in both a metaphysical and physical context. Metaphysical, as is defined as a discussion of the supernatural, but most importantly as a philosophical speculation, which the characters undergo in their letters, is important in
discussing the contexts of boundary and the creation and function of the characters in the novels. In particular to this discussion of boundary is how the individuals’ needs are expressed through loneliness, motivating the characters, and how they connect or disconnect, from society and companionship. These ideas of boundary help communicate the reflections of the inner selves that conflict with the outer self.

Ultimately, this leads to a discussion of Shelley’s self in the novel. How Shelley portrays the need of companionship in both Frankenstein and The Last Man characterizes the needs and functions of Walton, Frankenstein, Lionel, and Raymond as characters. This characterization resists a generalized gendered focus on need, understanding, and creation, illuminating Shelley’s discussions of the self and creator.

Shelley’s writing, including her novels, her letters, and journals gives a broader perspective of Shelley than the turn of the century motif of the one-time-author and wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley, which complicates previous discussions for the need of companionship portrayed in her works. Modern criticism is concerned with how Shelley viewed her life and with the feminist ideals found in her work. This broadening of the scope of Shelley scholarship is reflected in Esther Schor’s introduction to the 2003 Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley which “…places her achievement in a multiplicity of contexts: the Enlightenment novel of ideas; British Jacobinism; Romantic lyricism; Scott and the historical novel; Romantic and early Victorian women writers; and the nineteenth-century struggle between national movements and imperial powers” (2). Schor shows the expansion of Shelley criticism from the observance of her as a daughter and wife of other important authors to the development of the critique of her work as it stands alone.
With the above in mind, both a feminist critique and a critique of the relationship of Shelley as author of the texts will add to the continuously developing ideas of Shelley as author and the concept of loneliness, longing, and boundary found in the texts. The concept of authorship and the representation of boundary and relationships to physical, societal, and mental spaces add to the discussion of the melding of her private and personal selves with the narrative of the characters in her novels.

This brings us to question: why this particular pairing of Shelley’s novels? Many of Shelley’s novels show the interplay of the characters and individual boundary. Both *Matilda* and *Lodore* show Shelley’s analysis of familial ties, but also a distinctive narrative. Both contain biographical content, of which the unpublished *Matilda*’s criticism revolves around the incestuous father/daughter relationship. Critics such as Anne K. Mellor and Pamela Clemit in “*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the Legacies of Godwin,” focus on interpretations of the incestuous father and the capricious lover and their relation to Godwin and Percy.

*Lodore*, first published in 1835, has much of its criticism devoted to sibling relationships, as in Elizabeth Nitchie’s seminal work *Mary Shelley—Author of “Frankenstein,”* (1970) which refers to the characters’ resemblance to both Shelley and Lord Byron. Also, many of her short stories, such as “The Invisible Girl,” published in 1832, “Euphrasia,” published in 1838, and the unpublished “An Eighteenth-Century Tale: A Fragment” contain a retrospective narrative and autobiographical elements.

In addition, many critics have paired much of Shelley’s later work with her most famous work, *Frankenstein*. This pairing seems obvious, for many critics feel that this is Shelley’s superior work, as well as the beginning of a new genre. Critics have often
paired *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* because of the science fiction aspects of each text. Hugh J. Luke Jr. discusses this connection in his introduction to the 1965 reprinting of *The Last Man*, but in order to illuminate the importance of *Frankenstein* when he states “[w]hereas *Frankenstein* immediately gripped the imagination, *The Last Man* had little popular success and was damned by the critics” (vii). Similarly, in 1982, Brian Aldiss stated the science fiction importance of both texts in his essay “Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, 1797-1851,” first published in *Science Fiction Writers: Critical Studies of the Major Authors from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*.

As the study of Shelley has evolved, so has the criticism of *The Last Man* to include it as an important work in the budding genre of science fiction, along with *Frankenstein*, instead of recognizing the latter as the most important work to the genre. Mellor, in her 1988 work *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, shows the interplay of creation and guilt found in each text. Similarly, in 1996, Johanna M. Smith’s *Mary Shelley*, devotes a chapter to the discussion of Shelley’s influence and creation of science fiction in her discussion of short stories, *Frankenstein*, and *The Last Man*. It is with these studies in mind that the revised 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* will be used for this study in lieu of the original that appeared in 1818. There has existed a debate on the superiority of either version, which Nora Crook discusses in her article “In Defence of the 1831 *Frankenstein*. ” Here, Cook discusses the accepted differences of each text, and the claim that the 1831 edition “tame[s] her 1818 text and stifle[s] its characteristic charm with superfluous elaboration” (3). Yet, not only does Shelley consider it a more masterful edition, but the revision also occurs after the writing of *The Last Man*, which provides a unique perspective from her life experiences and loss, as Mellor notes in her
study of the works. Indeed, though Cook tries to show her appreciation for both sides of this issue, she too, sees the value of the later edition in discovering the change in Shelley’s thought, as well as a more “smooth” and readable text.

The present study draws on this previous criticism not only to discuss the importance of boundary in the novels but also to establish their similar narrative styles as an initial impetus for the pairing of these texts. Both employ an epistolary style, which allows for a different understanding of narrative for the characters. In essence, the characters are telling their own story. Additionally, both novels’ inclusion of letters that frame each text that, in essence, allows other characters to “speak” for the main characters is a striking point of comparison that has attracted other critics to these two works as well.

After this initial attraction of a retrospective narrative, it is the overarching idea of loneliness that binds these two works, in that each work produces a character forced to stand alone, and face the multitude of human understanding without a companion, and with fear, that is particular to these texts. The analysis of *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* revolves around the idea of singular characters, characters that feel isolated from both civilization and their families, by circumstances beyond their control and personal choice. Muriel Spark’s 1951 essay “Mary Shelley: A Prophetic Novelist,” discusses this pairing of these texts as the zeitgeist for the Gothic Romantic that “culminate in the Romantic motif of man in search of himself in conflict with himself and combine rational and natural themes with the imaginative elements of Gothic fiction” (qtd. in Frank 318). Other critics have noted additional parallels in the characters’ loneliness, as well as the portrayal of tragic events that are world altering.
With these contexts in mind, this study will begin by looking at *Frankenstein* and the boundaries of necessity and creation by focusing on Walton, Frankenstein, and Frankenstein’s monster in the act of Walton’s journey, including Frankenstein’s death and friendship with Walton, as well as the metaphysical reflections of Frankenstein’s monster. This same focus and interlay of boundary will be the lens of discussion for *The Last Man*. The work of Alan Bewell will be instrumental to a discussion of the characters of Lionel and Lord Raymond in the act of releasing the plague, the plague’s resistance and creation of boundary, and Lionel’s journey after the end of civilization. Coupled with these ideas will be a discussion of narrative modes in both texts and how the trends in the narrative of both of these novels help strengthen the connection directly between the texts and Shelley criticism. The act of writing, the theme of third person narrative, both influence the ideas of Shelley as author.

Drawing on the ideas of boundary, this will lead into a discussion of feminist critique by utilizing the work of Kristeva on boundary, Elizabeth Fay’s *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, and the work of Mellor. The complicated nature of the “other” in *The Last Man*, including the references to female identity and periphery, warrant a more in-depth feminist critique of Shelley’s works in this chapter. Other feminist criticism will strengthen the analysis of the interaction and roles of the characters, in particular the role of Evadne in *The Last Man*, which are important in this discussion.

It is the hope of this study to continue the discussion of Shelley’s role in the texts. The characters within the story use writing as a tool to connect to others outside of their boundary, either metaphysical or physical. Boundary, as discussed as a border and
creator of borderline identity, helps illuminate the longing and separation that permeate
the characters that Shelley creates in her two works, Frankenstein and The Last Man.
Chapter One

Walton and Frankenstein: Pushing Through Boundaries and Separation

The earliest narrator of *Frankenstein*, Captain Robert Walton, tells his story from a series of letters to his sister, Margaret. Here we discern some of his nature, his hopes, and ultimately the purpose of his journey. He seeks for greatness, but also the betterment of humanity, in finding a Northern Passage. This is not unlike Frankenstein, who hopes to help humanity escape death. Both characters live within and without boundary.

Walton wishes to push the boundary of human expanse, yet feels very alone. Frankenstein has already pushed his own personal boundaries, in the creation of his creature, but this creation consumes him and forces him to abandon his life and future goals. In Walton’s encounter with Frankenstein and the monster, boundaries, both inner, as is seen in Walton’s desires, and outer, as Frankenstein relating to the narrative converge.

It is in Walton’s earliest letters that the idea of boundary becomes apparent. He is attempting to extend both the boundaries of human consciousness, and the boundaries of the map. Yet, he finds himself alone during this journey in his lack of companionship. He relates in his second letter to his sister, “[b]ut I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend…” (10).

These early letters portray a deeper side of longing and loneliness, as is seen in the levels of his correspondence to his sister. The reader is unaware of Walton’s first
name until they have read the next letter, in which he proclaims his fears and loneliness. The tone is much different and the signature includes his full name, with his previous intent of dissuading his sister’s fears quickly dissolving as the events unfold. The next letter also has a fair chance of reaching her, and he has a very short time to write to her, yet his fears of never returning home are most salient in this correspondence. He wishes that she “remember him to all of his English friends” and signs “Most affectionately yours, R.W.” (13). Though Walton expresses his earlier desire to push through his own personal boundaries and find a new Northern Passage, his first correspondence does not relate any regret of having to leave his former life. However, by his second letter, he portrays a desire to be a part of his old life, remembered by friends, though this is physically impossible. Walton’s discussion of his desires and earlier life until this point portray a desire to break through normal boundaries, though when faced with the physical “break” from his past self into an unknown self, he longs to return, or have someone with him to console him and reassure him of his future.

In Walton’s need for a friend, he states in a letter to his sister, “…I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans” (10). At this point of his journey, Walton is further alienated from his crew by his desire to push forward, stalemating the voyage on frozen tundra. The crew fear death and Walton fears mutiny. When a strange figure appears on the ice, the crew’s fear is exacerbated. This is followed by the discovery of Frankenstein dying on the ice, alone.
When Frankenstein is brought aboard, he finds the friend of his desires, for indeed Frankenstein possesses all of the qualities, which adds to the tragedies that befall him in the story that he tells to Walton. He does “amend” Walton’s plans for the better, and is of a genial spirit, when not racked with the ideas of the “daemon” that possesses his thoughts. He understands Walton’s longing. Mellor concurs with many critics on how “Victor Frankenstein embodies certain elements of Percy Shelley’s temperament and character” (73). As Walton seeks companionship from Frankenstein, Mellor argues that Shelley over the course of her re-write of *Frankenstein* had longed for companionship from Percy, particularly after the death of their first two children. Mellor sees the narrative between Walton and Frankenstein as a place to express the issues she had with his character, in an attempt to better understand her feelings (73-144).

However, complicating these views of authorship, identity and positioning, is the function of Walton as foil to Frankenstein in evidence of his function as both character and narrator. Following Walton’s letters are the long narrative styles that will continue until the first chapter. This is when Frankenstein will become the first person narrator as transcribed by Walton. Yet, the reader sees Frankenstein’s monster first, evoking fear by surrounding Walton's crew with ice. This perpetual fear of the crew for their preservation and return to their homes helps to alienate Walton further from his crew.

This atmosphere of fear, mutiny, and other worldliness follows the introduction of Frankenstein. Walton’s inner self finds in Frankenstein the companionship he has longed for, stating, “I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind” (11). Frankenstein is the culmination of these desires, and knows the loss that Walton feels,
due to his own loss of his most treasured friends by his own doing. Yet, Frankenstein is unwilling to fulfill these desires due to his professional choices, furthering Mellor’s idea of Frankenstein’s resemblance to Percy.

Shelley’s viewpoint as author shows intermittently throughout the narrative of Walton. In the case of editing *Frankenstein*, Walton states:

Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. “Since you have preserved my narration,” said he, “I would not that a mutilated one should go down in posterity.” (173)

This again reflects the connection between the narratives perhaps suggesting that boundary being placed by Frankenstein on Walton has occurred for Shelley as well. Percy Shelley’s influence on the text appears to be more of a foreshadowing of the ideas that Shelley introduced in her amended version in 1831:

I will add but one word to the alterations I have made. They are principally those of style. I have changed no portion of the story, nor introduced any new ideas or circumstances. I have mended the language where it was so bald as to interfere with the interest of the narrative; and these changes occur almost exclusively in the beginning of the first volume. Throughout they are entirely confined to such parts as are mere adjuncts to the story, leaving the core and substance untouched.

(*Frankenstein* 192)
Both Frankenstein and Shelley feel that their story should not be regarded as incomplete. In this instance, Shelley is considered to have the final decision on her text, much different from Frankenstein, who dies before the creature meets Walton, infusing the end of Frankenstein’s life with his own misery.

Again, it is through the letter that during the beginning of the story we discern parts of Walton’s nature, or the parts of his nature that he feels important to disclose in letters to his sister. We see his spirit of adventure, the desire to travel as influenced at an early age, as well as his successes and failures. The early parts of Frankenstein’s narrative are not different in that we see the same impetuousness expressing the desire to explore and to learn, as with Walton. However, where Walton is still in the middle of his journey, Frankenstein’s exploration is ending. Walton has yet to experience what will occur after he pushes through his perceived boundaries of knowledge, whereas Frankenstein wishes his own experience with boundary to serve as a warning. Indeed, Frankenstein expresses these similarities in their nature and circumstance:

> You may easily perceive, Captain Walton, that I have suffered great and unparalleled misfortunes. I had determined, once, that the memory of these evils should die with me; but you have won me to alter my determination. You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been. I do not know that the relation of my misfortunes will be useful to you, yet, if you are inclined, listen to my tale. I believe that the strange incidents connected with it will afford a view of nature, which may enlarge your faculties and understanding. (18-19)
Frankenstein speaks these words at the beginning of his tale after he defends Walton to his mutinous crew. However, Walton acquiesces to leave after his crew continues to express their desires. Walton laments his defeat “I have consented to return, if we are not destroyed. Thus, are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed. It requires more philosophy than I possess, to bear this injustice with patience” (179). He has apparently reached the boundary of the crew; though he feels that he has further to go in his search.

The last words we hear from Walton are his descriptions of watching the monster disappear in the distance. Yet, before the scene is played out for our viewer, the reader is told what Walton does next—he returns to his letter. After a brief grieving for his friend, he remarks to his sister about a noise. Upon his return to the page, and to the narration, he states “Great God! What a scene has just taken place! I am yet dizzy with the remembrance of it. I hardly know whether I shall have the power to detail it; yet the tale which I have recorded would be incomplete without this final and wonderful catastrophe” (181). It appears that Walton has pushed through another boundary, in that he is able to relate the importance of the monster to the reader before Walton is shown meeting the monster. His reflection on the end of the tale, and the monster, comes before the scene becomes accessible to the reader. This influences the narrative in that the reader knows that Walton survives the encounter and feels a sense of completion though he leaves us with his character in horror.

Though Walton has heard Frankenstein’s story as a warning against pushing the limits of human understanding and boundary, the need to progress is still more important to Walton, and he feels as if he has failed in his search for fame and glory. Frankenstein,
on his deathbed, relates this want as vice and folly, though he too has had these desires. In a tribute to this desire, it may seem appropriate that Walton’s last words are in defense of Frankenstein, not pity for the monster.

The ideas of boundary as a motivating force to the characters and how this affects and changes the characters is expressed through Walton’s desire for friendship, and Frankenstein’s desire for redemption. Walton’s longing to push through physical boundaries in the search for a Northern Passage, acquiesce to boundaries with a mutinous crew, and manipulate the reader’s structural boundary by telling us the meaning of the end of the story before the reader actually is able to read the conclusion. Frankenstein has already pushed through his own boundaries of knowledge in creating the monster. His narration of his own story, that he had vowed would go with him to his grave, also shows this push through personal boundaries. In these instances, pushing through boundary is unsatisfactory for all the characters, and proves to be self-destructive.

In the next chapter, pushing though boundaries creates catastrophic events. Through the plague, Lionel and Raymond transverse through boundaries in different ways and these boundaries reflect the loneliness and need of companionship found within the text. Ultimately this discussion of boundary in both chapter one and chapter two will proceed to an in depth look at gender and narrative modes to reflect on the text and the function of Mary Shelley as a writer.
Chapter Two

Lionel and Lord Raymond: Boundaries of Inner and Outer Selves

As explored in chapter one, the creation of Frankenstein’s monster expresses the horrors of human expansion as depicted through Walton’s drive for a Northern Passage. This quest for unobtainable knowledge only leads to despair for the main characters. Correspondingly, *The Last Man*, a work that Shelley begins writing in 1826, after the death of Lord Byron in the Greek wars, relates the finite nature of human expansion by illuminating the disasters that occur when boundaries are broken, as the Lord Raymond character does in his release of the plague. In the end of each tale, Walton is alone due to death and discovery and so is Lionel due to the end of civilization through war.

*The Last Man* foretells the end of civilization caused by both social and environmental factors. Amidst political upheavals and war, the world suffers the aforementioned plague, freezing winters, and meteor showers, which all result in only three people roaming the continents, searching in vain for other survivors. The narrative offers a realistic vision of the future, in that it is not one thing, but a multitude of problems that leave the world in turmoil.

Framing this tale is the introduction by Shelley. It is similar to *Frankenstein’s* introduction in that it relates to inform the reader of the authenticity of the work to follow, or practicality of the more fictional aspects of the story. Yet, the introduction to *The Last Man* is different, in that it weaves narrative into this assumed reality. Shelley uses her own experiences, noting her own journal entries and travels, as the basis for
mythological foundation. Walton’s function in *Frankenstein* is Shelley’s function in *The Last Man*.

When she and her friend, undoubtedly Percy, are in Naples, they visit the Bay, and find Sibyl’s Cave. It is from the leaves of this cave that Shelley purports the following tale as inscribed in a prophecy of the end of civilization. The story that follows from the deciphering of Sibyl’s leaves is from the point of view of the last human on earth, Lionel, who is reflecting on his life with many emotions, and the overarching theme of loss. Samantha Webb discusses the importance of the framing narrative to the text in her work “Reading the End of the World: *The Last Man*, History, and the Agency of Romantic Authorship.” This essay reflects on the changing attitudes toward Shelley after “losing her primary audience” (120). Focusing on how Shelley’s growing conservatism in her later life leads to placing her work in the budding Victorian era, Webb aims to “save” Shelley’s later works from this classification. Elizabeth Fay also notes the “choice” Shelley made by eloping with Shelley and following the radicalism of her mother as opposed to that of her father, which left Shelley after the death of her husband “estranged from her father and facing greater conservatism at home” (195).

Webb bases her criticism on the Sibylline leaves and their importance to the narrative, claiming that “[i]n its frame structure, *The Last Man* foregrounds the dynamic exchange that occurs between writers and readers, questions the rhetoric that claims an ultimate cultural authority for authors, and develops new models for authorship, for composition, and for authority that go beyond notions of power” (120). Shelley becomes the translator of the Sibylline leaves, and as Webb points out, is a writer that is relatively unaffected about the apocalyptic future.
Personally, Shelley critiques herself as a writer and her ultimate purpose of writing the tale itself, and addresses her melancholy and longing for the past, positing, “[w]ill my readers ask how I could find solace from the narration of misery and woeful change? This is one of the mysteries of our nature, which holds sway over me, and from whose influence I cannot escape” (5). Webb also addresses this in her essay, where Shelley cites the famous journal entry in which she laments the loss of her “readers,” stating how “she writes and writes and you are not here to read it” (qtd. in Webb 120). Webb further discusses the connection with Lionel’s narrative in this context. Lionel is writing to an audience that no longer exists, as does Shelley after the death of her loved ones, in particular, P.B. Shelley. It is perhaps her longing for the past that influences the conception of the novel, but the loneliness that permeates *Frankenstein* intensifies in Shelley’s defense of her need to write *The Last Man*.

Lionel expresses this loneliness and despair at most points of the novel. As he continues to talk about his friends, he continuously mourns them, as he does his own fate. His physical boundary is not transmuted through the remembrance of those he loves. In turn, this only seems to heighten his own despair, loneliness, and ultimate fear that he is alone and will remain this way.

However, Mellor in her aforementioned work *Mary Shelley*, offers a different viewpoint on the function of the narrative and loneliness. In her chapter “Love, Guilt and Reparation: *The Last Man*” Mellor illustrates a brief history of Shelley’s life until the penning of *The Last Man*. Mellor notes that Shelley has cause to blame Percy for the death of their two children, citing a letter that Shelley wrote showing that they traveled to Italy for Percy’s health, but that trip was detrimental to her children’s fate (143).
However, this is not the only reason that Mellor reflects Shelley’s growing hatred for Percy. In her solitude and despair that no one seems able to penetrate, Shelley is noted to feel abandoned by Percy, who does not seem to share the intense grief that she is suffering. It is in this grief that she pens *Mathilda*, in which Mellor uses the scene between Woodville\(^1\) and Mathilda, in which he leaves her for his “altruistic” aspirations of his poetry, instead of sharing in her ultimate suffering, which she reluctantly wills to give him. Mellor presents this idea again in her discussion of the characters of Frankenstein and his friend Clerval, which Mellor sees as a projection of both sides of Percy’s character, the magnanimous and brooding genius (144).

Mellor confirms the mixed feelings of hate, love and abandonment in her discussion of *The Last Man*. Mellor situates Shelley’s complicated feelings about the death of her husband. Shelley has one surviving child, yet she is still feeling grief over the loss of her two children and suffering from a miscarriage. Here Mellor relates the problems of agency that will result in penning the work:

> When she picked up her pen in February, 1824, to begin what many critics consider her second finest work…she projected into her novel all the guilt and resentment she felt towards her husband and the political ideology he espoused. *The Last Man* thus functions both as an attempted exorcism and as social analysis and criticism. In psychological terms, the novel enabled Mary Shelley to gain distance from and some control over her profound anger and loss. However, the price she paid for this control was high, no

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\(^1\) Mellor notes that the original name for Woodville was “Lovel (love/evil)” (144). This has led to postulations of Lionel’s name as a variation of “lonely.”
less than the enduring definition of herself as the devoted widow of an
irreplaceable genius. (144)

Mellor’s ideas are also expressed in Mary Favret’s “Mary Shelley’s Sympathy and Irony:
The Editor and Her Corpus” where the position of Shelley as an editor of her late
husbands work is changed from the previous role of grieving wife in that “[t]he notes to
the Poetical Works introduce an editor more involved in the tangible world of her subject,
who is relegated to the airy realm of ‘genius,’ of ‘spirit,’ and, she implies, of poetry (20).

These views enlighten the complicated narrative of The Last Man. Shelley
emerges as grieving, for many people, but with different desires when she writes the
story. Most of Lionel’s story and his own personal narrative of his life before the
catastrophe show loss, the most salient idea, which permeates Lionel’s narrative. He
remarks on his elopement to his wife as an event of great triumph, which ultimately
pushes him beyond his early life as a disconcerted youth. His friendships become a
comfort. What Walton seeks in a true companion it appears that Lionel has found several
times over in his wife, sister, and subsequent brothers-in-law. His is a life of freedom
and luxury, but most importantly, one of contentment in his current position. Unlike the
desires of Walton and Frankenstein, he does not wish to join wars or politics like his
brothers-in-law, who also seek the betterment of human kind. He follows them to wars
and court from a sense of duty, but he feels most content not pushing through allotted
boundaries. It is the pushing through of these boundaries that end Lionel’s apparent
happiness, and separate him physically from civilization.

This is in sharp contrast to the Lord Raymond character in the novel, one of
Lionel’s brothers-in-law. His character resembles Lord Byron in many respects,
including his death in a foreign war, and his motivation of a sense of adventure and longing, that permeate the inner desires of both Walton and Frankenstein.

When Raymond is told a premonition of his death he instantly resolves himself to that fate, passing his hopes, longings, and desires into the realm of the dead: “[t]ime is no more, for I have stepped within the threshold of eternity; each man I meet appears a corpse, which will soon be deserted of its animating spark on the eve of decay and corruption” (147). He has passed through the metaphysical boundaries of living, yet is still mired by his earthly desires. He feels the need for a victorious death and the desires that both his tomb and his life will serve as a monument and be remembered in future generations, that he is very sure are to follow him.

However, dispelling his glorious death is the mounting of the plague in Constantinople, the city he hopes to besiege in an attempt to be immortalized as a conquering hero. His enemy quickly flees the city and his army does not want to die “like dogs” of the plague as well. Raymond decides that this plague is a common occurrence and that his men are being weak. Tortured by possible defeat, of both death and remembrance, he advances past the metaphysical boundaries of his existence when he exclaims to Lionel:

I have lived my last winter, and the date of this year, 2092, will be carved upon my tomb. Already do I see…the bourne and precipitate edge of my existence, over which I plunge into the gloomy mystery of the life to come. I am prepared so that I leave behind a trail of light so radiant, that my worst enemies cannot cloud it. I owe this to Greece, to you, to my surviving Perdita, and to myself, the victim of ambition. (153)
As discussed in the last chapter, the theme of ambition is a terrible force, a “daemon” that haunts those who wish to pass through socially accepted boundaries of fame, ambition, or knowledge. Raymond succumbs to his desires of pushing through a physical barrier in the gates of Constantinople. He is sure that this will force him from his life and loves in an attempt to push through the metaphysical boundary of life after death through his ideas of an impenetrable history of memory.

Lionel watches from a distance as Raymond is shown in full glory and alone, breaking through the boundaries of Constantinople and into the deserted street. When Lionel feels compelled to follow him through this boundary, he loses Raymond, but hears a crash in the distance which “[t]hunderlike…reverberated through the sky, while the air was darkened” (156). This cloud grows and enshrouds the city, unleashing the plague onto the soldiers, and subsequently the world. Raymond achieves his glorious death by pushing through the boundaries of Constantinople at the price of losing his life and unleashing terror into the world. In *Frankenstein*, the idea of boundary once broken becomes a disruptive force that will haunt the civilization forever.

Though other disasters occur, such as a freezing winter and asteroids, the plague will continue to haunt the small group of survivors until Lionel is the only person left. Moreover, the plague offers a new interpretation of physical boundary. Alan Bewell reflects the use of boundary in his study of colonial disease, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*. Here, Bewell reflects on the colonial desires of Raymond to conquer, for no other reason than what that conquering will mean to him personally, which leads to the destruction of first Constantinople, and then the world. Yet the plague does not “stop” at Constantinople. Bewell discusses the fear that Lionel expresses in his interpretation of a
map after the widespread epidemic, where no place on the map is safe, “captur[ing] a
critical moment in the history of epidemiology, which lies at the imaginative center of the
novel: the recognition that modern diseases do not respect natural geographical
boundaries” (298). The plague transcends all boundaries, and it exists as a metaphysical
entity, without a name that separates it from other plagues before it, thus embodying the
fear and soul of all plagues that have come before it—the fears that it gives the surviving
people, and the physical destruction, as one by one countries fall waste to the disease.
Yet, the ideas of metaphysical boundary and fear further muddy the accepted modes of
boundary as people begin to die. The leader of Britain flees his post, while the plague
affords him the opportunity to forget about his function as a leader and as a fellow human
being. When he is chastised for his choice to disregard societal boundaries, he states
“…when I am a plague-spotted corpse, where will my duties be? Every man for himself!
The devil take the protectorship, say I, if it expose me to danger” (192). Many other
characters take this view, and as civilizations crumble and the human race become
noticeably fewer, it forces Lionel and his family to retreat past their once comfortable
boundaries of home, in hopes of seeking salvation. Lionel reflects on how everyone has
become “equal,” and there are no poor or rich, just alive or dead.

However, this “boundary-less” existence of the plague is interpreted differently
for Lionel, because he survives the plague. Portrayed as a perpetually penetrating foe,
the plague affects every living thing. Though Lionel presents the plague as a way for
everyone to be equal, this is not apparent within the narrative, continually observing
social status, which happens to be one of the more perplexing parts of the narrative.
Bewell notes that The Last Man reflects Shelley’s attitudes toward the empire and the
global spread of diseases in “…what is one of the first major works in the historical ecology of disease, a study that crystallizes colonial disease experience” (298).

Though the plague is a great “equalizer,” many people still have slaves, and an “invisible” retinue of servants continues to care for Lionel and his family. This complicates the ideas of colonialism and the “other,” as well as it affects Lionel’s affliction with the plague:

I snatched a light, and rushing up stairs, and hearing a groan, without reflection I threw open the door of the first room that presented itself. It was quite dark; but, as I stept within, a pernicious scent assailed my senses, producing sickening qualms, which made their way to my very heart, while I felt my leg clasped, and a groan repeated by the person that held me. I lowered my lamp, and saw a negro half clad, writhing under the agony of disease, while he held me with a convulsive grasp. With mixed horror and impatience, I strove to disengage myself, and fell on the sufferer; he wound his naked festering arms around me, his face was close to mine, and his breath, death-laden, entered my vitals. For a moment I was overcome, my head was bowed by aching nausea; till, reflection returning, I sprung up, [and] threw the wretch from me. (265)

This slow and horrific scene is in contrast with his earlier sympathy and compassion. In the preceding moment, he began to fear for his family, he placed the child that he was trying to protect in his servants’ care, and rushed around violently. He physically opened the door and went into a room without realizing where he was, noting after the incident with the slave that he knew that it was not where his family dwelled. Again, pushing
through physical boundaries into the unknown is self-destructive, but the issue of
treatment is perplexing. Lionel shows no compassion for the child who has unwittingly
given him the plague, and his narration of the story only relates the growing fear and
confusion, not pity for the “wretch” that was quickly dying.

This physical incident leads to Lionel’s catching the plague; however, after
thinking he is going to die and saying his farewells, he recovers following three days of
intense illness. This, too, is a perplexing part of the narrative to many critics. Bewell
argues that Shelley is reflecting on the Romantic fear of contagion, though they are
frequently “engaging” the “other.” Questioning the survival of Lionel after his
encounter, Bewell reflects that “[p]erhaps Shelley wanted this embrace, which functions
as inoculation rather than contagion, to serve as an allegory of the fearful embrace of
colonial encounters” (313). Bewell discusses different aspects of this allegory in his
conclusion, however; “[t]he biological diversity—the ‘foreignness’—that causes so much
pain and suffering in the colonial world might also hold within it something that will
preserve at least some of us somewhere from the coming plague that Shelley prophesies”
(314). This reflects on the complicated boundary between nature and humanity.

The connection between nature and humanity is evidenced in the introduction to
Lionel’s narrative, where he offers a description of his place of origin, but instead uses
imagery shrouded by sea and shadow, as if the memory is dark and bleak:

I am the native of a sea-surrounded nook, a cloud enshadowed land,
which, when the surface of the globe, with its shoreless ocean and
trackless continents, presents itself to my mind, appears only as
inconsiderable speck in the immense whole; and yet, when balanced in the
scale of mental power, far outweighed countries of larger extent and more numerous populations. (7)

Both the introduction and the story that follows use the same first person point of view. As in *Frankenstein*, where Frankenstein is situated as an extension of Walton, here too is the same appearance. Shelley uses “I” to refer to herself in the introduction, and as in *Frankenstein*, begins the following narrative with “I” as well. Indeed, both texts are very similar in narration, as Frankenstein’s tale begins with, “I am by birth a Genevese; and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic” (19). In essence, the tone of Frankenstein’s story begins positively, with the portrayal of him growing up happily in Geneva. However, once he pushes through his boundary by creating the monster, his story becomes tragic. Alternatively, Lionel’s story originates negatively, portraying him as a troubled, goat herding youth. However, his life grows more positively as he becomes enlightened through his friendship with Adrian. Shelley’s reversed storytelling in the two books situates the characters differently, but consistently yields the notion that pushing through boundaries leads to despair.

Ultimately, Lionel ennobles the country of his birth, where he feels that he has experienced the friendship of the most knowledgeable human beings from this continent. After we have finished this narrative, it is assumed that these people are the memories of Lionel—of those that he has loved and lost. This echoes Shelley’s ideas in the introduction, where she outlines her loneliness and longing.

The narrator breaks from his discussion of loss to tell his history, starting with his youth and the life he led in the margins of society. Lionel remarks that his sister,
Perdita,\textsuperscript{2} and he were “singular” beings (11). Lionel and Perdita both prefer solitude to company which leads to Lionel’s vocation as a shepherder. Notably, Shelley remarks in her journals as well that as a youth she only enjoyed the friendship of one person. Shelley connects herself to the narrative of Lionel in very personal ways. This is the sentiment shown in much of Shelley’s journals about herself as a youth, preferring her own visions of fancy and the companionship of one close friend to that of other relationships. Mellor makes this connection in her summary of their connections where she states “both were ‘outcasts’ in childhood: both possessed a scholarly temperament, a literary imagination, and a preference for domestic pleasures and affections; both were in love with Adrian/Shelley and credited him with their salvation from intellectual ignorance and emotional misery” (157).

Lionel, in his loneliness, reflects on the idea of boundary as well, and on the abandonment by society he feels in his youth, through the default of the King’s obligations to his late father. It is because of this that he has never felt connected to anyone. His physical seclusion from society becomes a natural consequence of his mental seclusion from those around him.

Many other critics have questioned Shelley’s portrayal of the end of the world. In this future humanity is not the destined favorite of the earth, as many Romantics proposed, but the two are in constant opposition, as is evidenced in Lionel’s unhappy childhood as a goat herder. This rejects the Wordsworthian idea of the glory of nature, and that only true happiness can come from experiencing nature. Lynn Wells, in her essay “Triumph of Death: Reading and Narrative in Mary Shelley’s The Last Man,” shares Bewell’s view of Shelley’s questioning of the Romantic philosophy of nature. In

\textsuperscript{2} The Latin origin of the word meaning “lost.”
the narrative of the text Wells finds Shelley portraying “a series of Romantic figures who concurrently embody contemporary literary stereotypes and entire sets of ideas,” and these characters are an attempt to “create a space for herself, even as it recedes from her sight” in a world that she feels is completely altered (214).

The position that Wells discusses as Shelley creating a space for herself in a new world, but still separate, is evidenced in Kari E. Lokke’s article “The Last Man” which discusses the differences in Shelley’s apocalyptic fiction that of her successors:

Yet the extremity of her particular form of apocalypse bears comparison with twentieth-century existentialist, absurdist, and nihilist reactions to two World Wars, the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb, such as Camus’ *La Peste* of Ionesco’s *Les Chaises*, thus revealing *The Last Man*, like *Frankenstein*, as an uncannily prescient novel. In its refusal to place humanity at the center of the universe, it’s questioning of our privileged position in relation to nature, then, *The Last Man* constitutes a profound and prophetic challenge to Western humanism. (118)

So how is this important to the study of boundary in Shelley’s works? It depicts how Shelley transforms the ideas of humanity from the ultimate sphere of experience to a limited and protracted death. Lionel becomes an agent of remembering the exuberance of the past and his need for companionship, continually reflecting on the awesomeness of nature that can destroy these things, that transcends the self, and inner and outer boundaries.

Shelley does not leave Lionel on the beach after his niece and brother-in-law drowned, or, the Sibylline leaves do not end his story at this point. Lionel’s narrative
continues at great length, following the trials of his inner being to the accursedness of his.
fate. The reader follows Lionel as he tries to decipher which is the less painful way to
live. He feels the constriction of the empty cities and towns and ultimate sadness in his
entering of any of the domains. He discusses how this depresses his nature more in
constant remembering of the past. In keeping with the theme of the bounties of nature as
a release, Lionel feels compelled to live with nature, to dwell among the rocks and
forests, in an attempt to forget his fate.

What follows is a serious discourse in vicissitudes of grief and human desire.
Lionel remarks on the differences between humans and animals, remarking that though
animals and humans are essentially the same, animals do not feel misery as he expresses
it. He wishes to forget as the animals forget, but he then remarks that nature is left
untouched, and that animals retain their companionship. Lionel in a fit of rage remarks
on his engagement with a goat as he begins to understand the folly in believing in the
solace of nature:

…I gathered a handful of grass and held it out; the little one nestled close
to its mother, while she timidly withdrew. The male stepped forward,
fixing his eyes on me: I drew near, still holding out my lure, while he,
depressing his head, rushed at me with his horns. I was a very fool; I
knew it, yet I yielded to my rage. I snatched up a huge fragment of rock;
it would have crushed my foe. I poised it—aimed it—then my heart failed
me…my visitants, all aghast, galloped back into the covert of the wood;
while I, my very heart bleeding and torn, rushed down the hill, and by the
violence of bodily exertion, sought to escape my miserable self. (358)
Here, Lionel revolts against the bounties of nature in an attempt to quiet his soul, resolving to quit his ideas of living with nature “...no, I will not live among the wild scenes of nature, the enemy of all that lives. I will seek the towns—Rome, the capital of the world, the crown of man’s achievement” (358). In his despair he goes from one existence to the next, trying to find solace.

Yet his grief continues and he is compelled to write down his story, in hopes of reaching out to the unknown in his despair. He resolves to look for survivors, and asks the reader to look for him, if they find his writing. The world is open to him, boundless, and he knows that he can tread wherever he dares, for no one is left to stop him. He is boundless, but in this boundlessness, he finds ultimate loneliness. At the end of his narrative he writes about this boundlessness and his response to it “I shall witness all the variety of appearance, that the element can assume—I shall read fair augury in the rainbow—menace in the cloud—some lesson or record dear to my heart of everything” (367). In his freedom of expression, he still longs to share his experience forcing him to look critically at nature and everything that surrounds him as a key to that lost experience. Mellor addresses this idea in the solace that Shelley finds in the mere act of writing. Here, too, Lionel finds comfort by touching an audience in his “attempted exorcism” (144).

In both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, Shelley frames a narrative within a narrative. Both Walton, and Shelley as character in *The Last Man*, tell a story mitigated by outside forces. Though they are both telling the story of the characters, they both assume the use of “I” and in essence become the main character. Toward the end of *Frankenstein*, Walton regains his autonomy and again rejoins the story, though the story
needs to be “approved” first. This is not the case in *The Last Man*. Shelley remains as the character of Lionel, floating on the Mediterranean Sea, searching for life on foreign shores.

Unlike the characters of Walton and Frankenstein, Lionel is mired by a boundless life. What Frankenstein considered evil in his creation, Lionel would consider a blessing. What Walton seeks in expansion, so would Lord Raymond in his quest for adventure and the benefit of humanity. In all of these experiences, the idea of the desire to push through boundary is considered evil. Walton is unfulfilled, Frankenstein dies before his quest is finished, Lord Raymond unleashes a fury onto the world, and Lionel is punished by it. In being the “last man,” Lionel experiences terrible freedom and loneliness that permeates the tale. Lionel’s terrible boundary is boundlessness.

The following chapter explores these ideas of narration and purpose in terms of gender as boundary. How Shelley navigates the spheres of male character and female authorship are important in the discussion of boundaries of gender and the “other.”
Chapter Three

Feminism and Boundary in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*

Literature is no doubt the privileged realm in which language is exercised, clarified, and modified.

--Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown*

Undoubtedly, Shelley, as a female writer, uses male characters to disseminate her views on boundary and desire. Applying ideas of feminist criticism to her function as narrator to the text of *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* affect her role as female narrator of male characters revealing role reversals. This adds to the previous discussion of the function of characters and boundary in the texts, with an analysis of the feminist interpretation of the text, which not only revolves around issues of authorship and identity, but of gender, creation, and the position of the “other” and marginal identity. This chapter will discuss these prevalent theories in relation to the creation of Frankenstein’s monster, the ethic of care that becomes a focus for Walton, the gendered positioning of Lionel, Evadne, and the colonialized other. Kristeva’s theory of boundary and periphery will be paramount to this discussion, as well as Mellor’s views of gender positioning.

The role of *Frankenstein* in the history of feminist criticism is the locus of Diane Long Hoeveler’s essay “*Frankenstein*, feminism, and literary theory.” Here, she addresses the history of feminist scholarship in regard to *Frankenstein*. She shows the
predominance of spatial and historical trends in feminist scholarship, quoting Fred Botting who states, “Frankenstein is a product of criticism, not a work of literature” (qtd. in Hoeveler 45). Hoeveler continues this thought process by discussing Frankenstein and the modes between female identity and criticism, identifying the idea of imposed otherness of the characters, stating, “…critics have seized on Frankenstein as a paradigmatic text that expresses the ‘otherness’ of living differently abled in a world of able, hostile, or indifferent people” (59). As is seen in the previous chapters, the idea of pushing through boundaries is the essence of being marked for something different from those around other privileged characters in the texts. The desire to achieve goals outside of perceived boundaries becomes a force of regulation, a goal, that when attained will satisfy issues of identity and separation for the characters. Walton is evidence to this in his expressed desire for greatness, though it alienates him from his past life. In turn, Raymond feels propelled into the next life, though his transfiguration in life will only occur if he persists in his ideas of a grand death.

These ideas of boundary thrust the characters into the periphery. Both Walton and Frankenstein portray the same idea of being placed in the periphery, by longing for acceptance through a relationship with another human being. The cycle of need between boundary and belonging, place Frankenstein into a feminist context in the othering of the characters and their desire to be freed from the boundary.

This idea of periphery expands the feminist readings of the text that tend to look toward the politics of the Romantic period. The idea of nature as sublime is a recurrent theme in this period, yet many feminist critics see this implication as a farce. Giving birth to male writers and male sons who will inherit titles and wealth is a concept that
Elizabeth Fay addresses in regard to Shelley’s monster and the female roles within the novel:

[...] For writers like Mary Shelley the idea is literary monstrous, as she demonstrates with her creature made of male parts and fitted together by a male/scientist creator...the women in Shelley’s novel—Frankenstein’s mother, his wife, his servant, and the female he begins to piece together as an Eve for his male creature—must all die horrible deaths. They are all torn apart (quite literally in the case of the female creature) by the violence of the novel’s metaphors for subjectivity and art. (68)

Many critics see the positioning of the female sphere as important to the text, evidenced in the portrayal of the body in the works. Mellor reacts differently to these ideas of creation; she sees Shelley creating a purely new mythos, where “[t]he idea of an entirely man-made monster is Mary Shelley’s own” (38).

In accordance with these ideas, but developing the female gendered aspects of the creator in *Frankenstein*, Susan Wolstenholme discusses how the male center of the novel serves as a “purveyor of woman-identified interests,” such as in the case of childbearing and in other instances of identity as author, as Fay illustrates in her ideas on *Frankenstein*. In Wolstenholme’s study, she addresses the idea of power, but also the idea of female centered modes of communication. The need for acceptance, yet still having a space to articulate an authentic experience, are at the heart of both Walton and Frankenstein’s narratives. The gender of the characters becomes less important than the inherent desires and needs of each to reach their ultimate goals, but to have a connection with someone to validate these experiences. This is important to Mellor’s study of
Shelley’s authorship of the texts. As stated in the previous chapter, Mellor situates Shelley in a place of mourning, but also in a state of anger and pain when she decided to write *The Last Man*. Mellor postulates the meaning of the work and how its future interpretations are proof of her dutiful love to Percy. Mellor sees Shelley’s plots driven by a need for companionship and understanding, a desire that both Walton and Lionel express.

The narrative that outlines the narrative infuses the plot with gothic imagery of isolation and the need for companionship. This furthers the ideas of separation that Hoeveler discusses in her look at the periphery. Along with the idea of periphery, Kristeva develops the idea of “borderline” experience in her discussion of discourse and the feminine in language. This image of each part of the story—first on a moored ship, which will ultimately be the end of the latter story, then the mountain ranges in Switzerland, and a boarded room of forced solitude—all portray the borders of civilization and human relationships. Both Walton and Frankenstein impose themselves into the forced borderline between human knowledge and human experience, while seeking that of companionship and acceptance. In Constantinople, Lionel is placed away from the gates of the city and Raymond; and when civilization is wiped out, Lionel is placed outside the realm of nature, but with no solace or place to dwell, forever in the periphery.

The interplay of gender roles also places the characters in the periphery. When Walton expresses in his letters to Margaret his desire to be seen as “safe” to his friends that remain at home, it is also revolved around the ideas of his acceptance and ultimate care of Frankenstein. Gilligan states:
...because women’s sense of integrity appears to be entwined with an ethic of care, so that to see themselves as women is to see themselves in a relationship of connection, the major transitions in women’s lives would seem to involve changes in the understanding and activities of care. (150)

Though Gilligan is remarking about trends she sees in female relationships, the idea centered on care, the need to care for someone, as a mode of acceptance, is shown in Walton’s relationships to both his sister and to Frankenstein. This discourse of concern and need, when applied to Frankenstein, helps center Walton’s narrative around ideas of female centered need and acceptance in the relationships he seeks, as Mellor discusses.

Gender and the portrayal of borderline experience and desire are also important in discussing the nuisances of gender identity in The Last Man. Reversing traditional roles in many instances, women are shown in positions of power, and men are considered romantic and weak. People within the narrative seem to exist outside normal gender roles and live as autonomous beings that are accepted, regardless of gender. Identity becomes less transfixed with gender than with personal characteristics, such as pure love, in the character of Clara, and pure good in the character of Adrian. Gender becomes fluid as in the story of Evadne.

In Strangers to Ourselves, Kristeva develops the idea of the “Romantic hero” when she connects motivation and operation:

The strangeness of the Romantic hero thus assumed substance and shape and presented itself as the fertilizing soil out of which a heterogeneous notion of unconscious sprang forth—simultaneously as man’s deep link with nature’s dark substratum...as underlying the will to representation
Kristeva links the Romantic hero to the romantic visions of the earth as in the study by Lokke, but more importantly, this operation “beneath the surface” can be seen as a motivating force for Evadne.

The idea of Kristeva’s Romantic hero and borderlines takes on new meaning in *The Last Man*. On the battlefield, Evadne assumes the guise of a man to fight with her beloved. She simultaneously operates within and outside accepted gendered boundaries. She does not apologize for this behavior and explains her choices to be the natural recourse for her destroyed life. Gendered identity is continuously unimportant to Lionel, who wishes for her safety and laments her loss. Lionel sanctifies her choices, instead of reprimanding them. He takes great care to make sure that her last rites are attended to, showing how he continuously cares deeply about humanity. Lionel is an example of Gilligan’s view of care and need when he assumes the care of those around him while they are ill with the plague. This is in contrast to Mellor’s view of the text when she sees that “[i]n both the public and private spheres depicted in *The Last Man*, women have only a relational identity, as a wife or mother” (156). Though Evadne was neither a wife nor a mother, she does cross gender boundaries to be closer to Raymond, which in the end is the element that sanctifies her in Lionel’s eyes. Yet, he does accept her, which can show his ability to see past gender roles, despite these gender choices.

Yet, in the death of Evadne, this idea of care is most important in terms of Lionel. Evadne is in love with Raymond, Lionel’s sister Perdita’s husband, yet this does not dissuade Lionel from respecting her fierceness in battle and admiring her undying love
for Raymond. With her death, she foretells the destruction that is yet to come, “I have sold myself to death, with the sole condition that thou shouldst follow me—Fire, and war, and plague, unites for thy destruction—O my Raymond, there is no safety for thee!” (142). Yet, Lionel sees this as a progression of her delirium, listening with “an heavy heart.” This prophecy propels Raymond into the periphery of his existence before his death, which in turn compels him to push through the gates of Constantinople.

However, as is discussed in the previous chapter, the idea of the “other,” complicates Lionel’s altruism and open attitudes toward gender as portrayed in his acceptance of Evadne and his interactions with the plague. Lionel proves to be a different person when confronted with his own demise. The plague, as it exists without boundary, creates boundary as is discussed in the previous chapter. Infection separates the rest of society into two spheres, those that are infected, and those that are waiting to be infected. Those that are infected are placed in the periphery, for they are going to die. Though Lionel shows the greatest sympathies for those that are dying, he does not display this altruism in his connection with the “wretch.” There have been several interpretations of the “other” in this scene, as was discussed by Bewell in the previous chapter. Kristeva conceptualizes the idea of “othering” in her study *Strangers to Ourselves* where she questions the formation of identity in comparison to her previously discussed ideas of the margin and the periphery. In her section devoted to the universality and foreignness, she complicates the meaning of “foreign” in relation to any one body when she states:

With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the
assumed unity of human beings an *otherness* that is both biological *and* symbolic and becomes an integral part of the *same*. Henceforth the foreigner is neither a race or a nation. The foreigner is neither glorified as a secret…nor banished as disruptive of rationalist urbanity. Uncanny, foreignness is within us: we are own foreigners, we are divided. (181)

In Lionel’s interaction with the other, he is reacting with himself, since he is in essence the “other” in his separation from society. This is in relation to Bewell’s ideas of Shelley’s acceptance of the foreigner and a portrayal of a different mindset toward colonialism. As well, this idea of separation and foreignness translates to the creation of boundaries in relationship to the characters. This idea of division enforces the desire to connect to and transverse boundaries in Walton, Frankenstein, Lionel and Raymond.

The multitude of feminist lenses through which to look at Shelley’s works help to unravel the complexities of character identity in the text. The boundary of gender is not transfixed in both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*. Yet, in the complexities of driving forces and periphery that each character is forced to endure, Shelley has purposely chosen their gender. The “performance” of this gender affects in the overall impotence of the characters the ideas of the ethics of care and borderline existence.
Conclusion

The interplay of metaphysical and personal boundaries permeates the characters in both of Mary Shelley’s works Frankenstein and The Last Man. Metaphysical contexts of boundaries have been discussed through an analysis of the creation and function of the characters through the individuals’ needs, loneliness, and discovery drive. Physical boundaries are explored through the desire to “push through” these boundaries of knowledge and physical lines of demarcation. Both ideas of boundary help communicate the reflections of the inner selves that conflict with the outer self.

These two novels were chosen for study because they push past the boundaries of the narrative styles found within texts. Both use epistolary style, allowing for a different understanding of the narrative for the characters. Both narrators become the main characters. Walton becomes Frankenstein, and Shelley becomes Lionel by the use of the pronoun “I” when telling the story of others. Both are themed by loneliness, and each work produces a character that is forced to face the multitude of human understanding alone and full of fear.

As discussed in the first chapter, boundary is a motivating force and has a profound effect on the characters in Frankenstein. It is detrimental for Frankenstein because it destroys his life. Walton learns from this, and chooses not to push through his own personal boundary, and instead he chooses to go back to civilization. Both circumstances are unsatisfactory for the characters.
In chapter two, *The Last Man* portrays that exceeding boundaries destroys the world. We get the tragedy of the finite nature of human expansion. Lord Raymond, in his colonialist search for adventure, ends detrimentally for himself and the world when he breaks through the physical boundary of Constantinople. This expansion leads to Lionel being trapped within a boundary of a boundary-less existence.

As author, Shelley works with boundary in both texts in another way. Chapter three shows that the boundary of gender is not transfixed in either *Frankenstein* or *The Last Man*. Female authorship affects the text in the periphery as is reflected in Hoeveler. Walton, Frankenstein, Raymond, and Lionel all have borderline existences as is analyzed by Kristeva, and Gilligan’s ethics of care, as is seen in Walton’s care of Frankenstein and Lionel’s overall characteristic of care-giving, further the examination of the influence of gender to the text. This becomes influential in discussing narrative modes.

Periphery, borderline existence, boundary, gender, and narrative come together as a way to understand both Shelley’s function as writer and the function of Walton and Lionel. These different perspectives influence each other as do the characters that influence them, and so narrative transfigures boundary and desire, as well as the gender roles of the narrators themselves. Narratives that evolve from other narratives and the roles of the narrators themselves are at the center of this study. Narrative transfigures boundary and desire, as well as the gender roles of the narrators themselves, as is discussed in the previous chapter focus this study, centering on the role of Shelley as author, narrator, and character within the texts of both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*. 
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